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ABSTRACT

This study examined the outcomes of student conflict mediation at two urban middle schools in California. Data collection involved observations, interviews, and instrumentation with the Mediation Rating Profile (C. Carter, 1998), and a writing prompt. Several mediation agreements contained avoidance resolutions, such as "stay away from each other." Communication gaps existed in the typical conflict mediation intervention that allowed for reproductive resolutions; transformative resolutions were limited to the avoidance of violence. The conflict mediation intervention needs to help students attain a productive resolution, one that is just for all students and will improve their relations, especially when students' conflicts have the potential for recurrence and violence. (Contains 59 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Running Head: CONFLICT MEDIATION AT SCHOOL

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Conflict Mediation at School: Peace Through Avoidance?

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Abstract

This study examined the outcomes of student-conflict mediation at two middle schools. Data collection involved observations, interviews, and instrumentation with the Mediation Rating Profile (Carter, 1998) and a writing prompt. Several mediation agreements contained avoidance resolutions; "Stay away from each other." Communication gaps existed in the typical conflict mediation (CM) intervention that allowed for reproductive resolutions; the avoidance of social cooperation, acceptance, and understanding. The conflict-mediation intervention needs to help students attain a productive resolution; one that is just for all disputants and will improve their relations, especially when students' conflicts have the potential for recurrence and violence.

This study examined the reproductive and transformative aspects of formal mediation. A Reconstructionist philosophy is common in the organizations that promote conflict-resolution training and multicultural education (Thomas, 1994). The goal is to help students develop the capacity to engage in social change; create a nonviolent and cooperative milieu. Although proponents view that goal as instrumental for creating social harmony, critical theorists disapprove of teaching students from disparate social and economic levels to use peer mediation for resolving their conflicts (Nadar, 1992, Saletan, 1984). They contend that the resolutions made in the context of conflict mediation lack the justice component which is a goal in social renewal.

This research documented the impact of a conflict-resolution intervention on student interaction and their resulting satisfaction. The improvement of students' interactions and relations was one focus. As a means to the improvement of interpersonal relations, communication that resulted from the intervention was another focus. Examination of these foci included the students' views of their participation in, and satisfaction with, the conflict mediation (CM) process in addition to the researcher's observations. Critical interpretation of that data illuminated the processes in which social reproduction and social transformation occurred with the intervention. Social reproduction is the maintenance of extant relations whereas social transformation is their improvement, especially for the typically unempowered. Following are further clarifications of the terminology in this paper and the process of conflict mediation at school.

Student Classifications

Culturally marginal students such as those with limited-English proficiency (L2) and minority identities face additional challenges in majority culture schools Minority culture (C2) students are recent immigrants, including their second-generation offspring, and members who identify with an ethnic or NonWestern subculture. Majority culture students (C1) identify with the Northern-European heritage, values, and race that are most represented in this country's school curricula and personnel.

The Intervention

Conflict mediation is an increasingly popular intervention that is being adopted in schools throughout this country as a peaceful method of dispute resolution (Bowen & Gittler, 1993; Florez, 1999; Jones, 1999; Stephens, 1998). The intervention requires structured problem-solving communication between disputants and mediators who guide the disputants in their search for a peaceful resolution to their conflict. When the disputants agree on a resolution, the mediation ends. The intervention is intended as a form of 'sociolegal formalism' (Araki, 1990) in which disputants sign the written agreement they made for resolving their conflict. Schools that are currently using mediation are training students to mediate conflicts and to participate in that intervention during the school day.

The recommended implementation method of conflict mediation in schools is uniform (Crawford & Bodine, 1996; Girard & Koch, 1996). However, the degree of implementation has been influenced by the amount of organizational support for the program, teacher implementation of the corresponding curriculum, and students' expectations (Ausburger, 1992; Hart, 1994; Patti, 1996). Advocates contend that when schools provide adequate support, they will have positive results from their CM programs; an increase in their students' interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills.

The participation of students in conflict mediation is variable. Students may choose to have a conflict mediated, may be sent to mediation by school personnel, or called in when another student who is involved in a common conflict requests mediation. Mediated conflicts may include, but are not limited to: (a) conflicts between students, (b) conflicts between students and teachers, (c) conflicts inside classrooms, and (d) conflicts in other school areas. The type of participation is classified by the behaviors of the disputants. Crawford and Bodine (1996) provide the following common classifications of behaviors in mediation: force, negotiate, compromise, smooth, and withdraw. In this country, negotiation is the commonly advocated mode for dispute-resolution behavior. It is expected that the negotiation mode of resolving conflicts will be most productive for all disputants, regardless of their diverse cultural styles of conflict communication (Carter, 1999).

Proponents of conflict mediation claim it has several positive effects. First, students learn how to avoid violent resolution to their conflicts. Second, conflict resolution training is an efficient intervention that reduces class time spent resolving students' conflicts and adds to the time spent training students to cooperate (Bastianello, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Acikgoz, 1994). In addition, the conflict mediation process provides practice with critical thinking, problem solving, self-discipline, and communication skills (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Opotow, 1991). Third, the self-esteem of trained students improves with mediation practice due to their feelings of empowerment (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Maxwell, 1989). Cummins (1989) points out how an "interactive/experiential" pedagogy can help empower L2 students who traditionally are taught helplessness in passive roles. Fourth, future generations born to students who were trained in mediation will be better conflict-solvers and more open to mediation for that purpose (Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1992). Finally, students and school personnel improve communication and deepen their understanding of themselves and each other, "thereby improving school and community climate and preparing students to live in a [less-violent] multicultural world" (Davis, 1986, p. 293). Indeed, Jeffries and Harris (1998) found that the integration of peace education strategies like conflict mediation are prerequisites to instruction in school climates where students' have been distracted by problems that can turn violent. Research on CM in schools found that teachers saw "...the elements of climate most notably affected were the development of a productive learning envirnonment, maintenance of high standards, creation of a supportive and friendly environment, and development of positive overall climate (Jones, 1998, p. 21). Yet, in the same study, students had limited to moderate recognition of their school climate improving as a result of the intervention. The success of the program may be more highly rated by teachers because it serves their need to keep a satisfactory teaching environment while students may experience less success in producing productive resolutions to their conflicts without teacher guidance.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Successful negotiation is a culturally constructed definition. Majority culture definitions define success according to the product---resolution. Fisher and Brown (1988) posit that successful negotiation results with a mutually beneficial resolution for all disputants. Totman (1985) describes successful negotiation as, "the threshing out of a new perspective; a higher level set of rules tabling which moral courses are fitting in what circumstances " (p. 144). Although Totman was considering a context of international dispute resolution, his definition is applicable to students. The Reconstructionist goal of CM advocates is for students to choose morally right action together in their problem-solving discussion.

Conflict-resolution-program developers define a successful conflict mediation as one which culminates with a mutually satisfactory agreement between the disputants. However, an imbalance in level of personal satisfaction resulting from a resolution agreement may occur when students' cultural norms are to accommodate the other during a dispute, to save face, or preserve a relationship instead of negotiating (Emminghaus, Kimmel, and Stewart, 1998). Preventing the possible embarrassment of the other is saving face. In addition, 'comembership' (Erickson and Schultz, 1982) in the same cultural-linguistic group can determine the level of accommodation and cooperation in the dispute-resolution process. For example, disputants may account for their commonality, or lack of, when choosing their level of mode assertiveness (Carter, 1998; Khorram, 1994; Lee, 1991). In those cases, successful negotiation can be acceptance of a resolution that is not personally satisfying to all disputants.

Prevalent in the conflict-resolution literature of this country is the majority perspective of how conflicts are resolved. Conflicts are won like contests. Indeed, the literature that prescribes how to have a "win win resolution" (Drew, 1987; Macbeth & Fine, 1995; Fisher & Ury, 1991) is using the competitive-contest metaphor to encourage cooperation. This pervasive conceptualization illustrates the deep-rooted individualism with which the majority culture perceives human interaction. If that is the case, do students of collectivist cultures change their behavior in CM to pursue personally productive resolutions or reproductive ones that maintain social tensions?

Critical Analysis

Critics of current mediation programs are concerned about who is truly helped and satisfied with conflict resolutions students make at school (Chesler, 1994; Nader, 1992; Rule, 1993). They claim that disputants, especially C2 students, are participating in mediation without being truly served; obtaining just resolutions. Hicks (1988) recommends a look at the processes that create or perpetuate stratification in society. Gadlin (1994) warns that "certainly we must be sure that dispute resolution is not used merely to control or deny the emergence of race-related conflicts" (p. 45). Kivel and Creighton (1997) point out that CM alone does "not prepare young people to address the social causes of violence" (p. 33).

Critical theorists are not sure that containing conflict in school is not political, social, and economic oppression of the underclass in our society. Indeed, they assert that the program is designed not to eliminate the economic differences in our society, but to regulate them (Giroux, 1996). Even proponents of peace education admit that CM "programs do not focus on prevention and do not prepare young people to address the social causes of violence" (Kivel & Creighton, 1997, p. 33). Dedring (1976) postulates that changing peoples' perspectives to view peaceful conflict resolution as productive can be counterproductive in situations where great changes are necessary. Researchers should discern if, and how, CM contributes to the preparation of minorities, "for subordinate positions in the prevailing stratification system" (Ogbu, 1987, p. 274).

The debate between the proponents and the critics of CM has highlighted the need for research to identify how the processes and outcomes of CM improve or maintain students' sense of power and their social relations. Furthermore, does participation in the program improve students' interpersonal-communication skills? While proponents of conflict resolution in schools point out how school violence can be reduced by full implementation of the intervention, critics argue that we need to examine if formal dispute resolution interventions control race-related conflicts instead of contributing to their elimination (Gadlin, 1994; Hicks, 1988).

The following is a description of research on the CM process for culturally and linguistically diverse students in two middle schools of California where staff training and support for implementing the intervention had been provided.

Subjects

Although they were in economically stratified locations of the same city in California, both middle schools, Hilltop and Central, had diverse populations. The Hilltop student body of 1,695 was comprised of a 50 percent minority population of whom 32 percent were Latino, 8 percent were African American, and 10 percent were other groups which were mainly Asian. The Central student body of 866 was comprised of a 42 percent minority population of whom 33 percent were Latino, 4 percent were African American, and 21 percent were other groups. All students who participated in CM at their school during the year this study was conducted were subjects. Identification of those subjects occurred through an examination of the mediation records at each school and the researcher's observations of mediations during the study.

The degree of subject classification depended on their participation in data generation at different levels. Briefly, those levels included (a) completion of a mediation agreement, (b) response to a measure immediately after mediation, and (c) inclusion in an instrumentation session with the researcher. The following is a description of the group of 56 students from both schools who generated data for the three levels. Students self-classified their characteristics on a demographic questionnaire. There were 25 Caucasian and 31 of other races with 15 born in another country, and 14 who indicated English was not their home language. Forty-two females and 14 males comprised the group of 56. Grade breakdowns for the group were 17 sixth-graders, 23 seventh-graders, and 16 eighth-graders. The age composition included 11 of age eleven, 22 of age 12, 15 of age 13, and 8 of age fourteen. In summary, 75 percent were females, 55 percent were minorities and there was a normal distribution for grade level and age.

Data Collection

Observations

Observations of CM participants proceeded during January and February in the middle of the year-round-school schedule. The middle of the school year was selected as the optimal period for observation due to its distance from the increased activities that occur in the beginning and ending of the school year. Also, the CM program was then not novel to sixth-graders who had begun matriculation.

Prior to every observation of a CM, the facilitator asked the mediators, and then the disputants whom the mediators called from their classes, if the students would mind the researcher's observations. None of the CM participants expressed any form of discomfort with the researcher's presence prior to, and during, the observations. While observing the CM sessions, the researcher sat directly across the room from the disputants and took brief pencil notes that were greatly expanded immediately afterwards. Data collected during the observations included the conflict topics, participant discourse, interaction, and agreements as well as evaluations of the mediators' skills in CM.

Interviews

To triangulate the evaluations of the mediations and the mediators' skills, the researcher interviewed the CM facilitator after each session. Further triangulation of the conflict mediators' facilitation and problem-solving skills was accomplished by having the CM facilitator rate each of the mediators who had facilitated mediations that year.

At each site, interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and an aide who participated in the referral to CM or facilitated the sessions. The principals were interviewed to document their views of the mediation intervention and the influence of student characteristics in the referral-to-mediation process. The mediation facilitators were interviewed to ascertain their views of the CM process. At the end of the instrumentation periods, the researcher informally interviewed the students about their participation in CM. A questionnaire obtained information

from staff members who were not interviewed. The interview questions followed the same order as those in the questionnaire.

Documents

Blank mediation request forms were kept in the office for students to pick up voluntarily or for administrators, counselors, and teachers to use when they became aware of students' unresolved disputes. The request documented the students' identities, problems, and prior history of disputes with each other. Daily, the CM facilitator collected the mediation request forms and prepared for the CM session. The CM facilitator pointed out that while the school staff referred most of the students to CM, some students had referred themselves. Student self-referral is a goal of peace education and a step the schools encourage students to take.

Documents examined included mediation request and mediation agreement forms that were completed during the first nine months of the district's 12-month school year as well as home-school communiqués. Mediation-session forms documented who participated and the agreement the disputants made. The student mediators or the adult facilitator wrote the agreement the disputants made on the form and had the disputants sign it. The form was then filed away from the purview of others and remained in the mediation-intervention files as an historical record of the CM and the disputants' problems. Examination of school letters to parents as well as the Parent/Student Handbook provided insights into the amount of parent awareness about the CM program. No mention was made of it in the handbook, which was surprising since it had been in place for years and was a major component of the behavior-management program.

Instrumentation

Instruments and letters to the students' families were translated to Spanish which was in some cases their first, or only, language for reading. No other language than Spanish was identified as the single language of a CM participant's parents. Prior to the collection of data with instruments, a parent-consent letter was sent home with every student who participated in the CM program that year. Students whose parents did not object to the data collection from their children participated in the data collection. A demographic questionnaire ascertained the subjects' ages,

birthplaces, as well as their self-evaluated cultural identities, fluencies in English, and level of self-pride.

Student satisfaction with the CM intervention was assessed with the Mediation-Rating Profile (Carter, 1998). Eight statements are included in the measure presenting satisfaction with CM in repetition as both positive and negative statements. The third and fourth statements are measures of dissatisfaction with the CM intervention. Hence, those statements are a check for comprehension of The Mediation Rating Profile (MRP) statements as well as social desirability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The MRP contains a Likert scale with the higher score for agreement with each statement. The formula for scoring assigned the third and fourth items negative values to subtract from the satisfaction total. Responses that are consistently at one end of the score scale can indicate a contradiction in the subjects' responses, which may invalidate the data. Thus, data from subjects who had contradictory responses were not used in analysis. A freewrite prompt, which was given at the end of the instrumentation period with the researcher, documented student evaluation of their participation in CM. Answers to the three questions in the freewrite measure were scored to indicate a positive or negative response.

Student Participation

Limited-English Language

Hilltop. Level of English fluency was a filter for participation in CM at Hilltop. The monolingual facilitator at Hilltop explained in an interview that she was not successful in managing conflicts in Spanish; the second language that is commonly spoken in the community. During this study, the one Spanish mediation she tried to facilitate with Spanish-speaking mediators failed, according to her, so she had to call in a bilingual administrator to take the disputants to the office. Hilltop teachers explained that, "They [L2 students] won't participate. They get frustrated." Although all of the office staff at Hilltop claimed in interviews that the second-language learners were able to use CM, it was not successfully occurring. Recognition that the L2 students were not being fully served by CM at Hilltop was apparently limited to the CM facilitator and a few teachers.

Central. During her lunch period, one bilingual teacher facilitated most of the mediations with bilingual mediators and saw no hesitancy of students in any category towards using CM. On another track, the CM facilitator, who was a monolingual teacher, had no observations on student participation. She had done only two mediations that year prior to the study, and none during the study. Apparently, students were not seeking her for mediation and the faculty were not sending them. In a self-contained English-Language-Development class, another teacher held mediations with his own students. The level of CM use at both schools was related to the ability to facilitate mediation in more than one language.

Examining Success

One of the major categories of conflicts that was evident in the review of the mediation records was defamation. A prevalent resolution to name-calling conflicts was an agreement by the disputants to discontinue their communication with each other. In both the records, and the mediations that were observed, avoidance of the other disputant was a solution that the disputants offered and then agreed to do as a resolution. The question of how the avoidance solution to defamation conflicts helped the subjects in their future interactions, and who benefited most from the avoidance, were critical questions on the researcher's mind as observations continued. A review of one of the observed mediations illustrates these questions.

On the suggestion of another student, Sarah, an African American, came to mediation to resolve her conflict with a Caucasian male. Both students were in the same sixth-grade classes. In the CM format used at both schools, the students sat next to each other and faced mediators who asked them if they agreed to the CM rules before starting the mediation. One of the rules was to "Only tell parents about the conflict mediation if they ask about it, but don't tell any of your friends." The promise of confidentiality is germane to all CM's. After soliciting verbal agreement for obedience to the CM rules, the mediator asked the disputants, Sam and then Sarah, to describe the problem. Sam said his friend had spread a rumor that Sam had been calling Sarah a "nigger." Sarah responded that she was very upset to hear the label used about her and she had become angry with Sam and his friend. After explaining that he had not used that label, Sam said that he

did not know its original source in the class where it was used. Sarah apologized for becoming upset when hearing the rumored label. When a mediator asked the scripted question "What could have been done differently?" Sarah said she could have just ignored the report of the name calling. Her solution was to not to listen to the boys in her class. The written resolution on the mediation agreement was to "Ignore what people say."

During informal interviews between mediations with the CM facilitator at Hilltop, the definitions of successful CM was solicited more than once. In every response, her focus was on facilitating interpersonal communication.

> Mediation success is starting the communication process. What the students do with it is up to them. In my opinion, a successful mediation is one where you can feel that the disputants have had an equal opportunity to express their thoughts and they are satisfied that they were heard.

Critical questions arose in response to student resolutions that were unproductive, yet 'successful' according to the extant criteria. Does immediate satisfaction in the CM carry over to contexts outside of CM? How satisfying is it to forgive another for name calling, especially racists names? How satisfying is it for an adolescent to avoid the slanderer and forget the offense? It is clear that the offender is served by the intervention if privacy is maintained and future avoidance offers protection from retaliation or solicitation of help from family and trained adults. In a school context where peace was the stated goal for all interaction, the antecedents of physical violence: verbal confrontations, were buried in the psyche and mediation records after formalized expression of the pain they caused. If Sarah's African American administrator had read her mediation agreement, he would have been aware of the racial slurs that the students were tolerating. Was the pain of racism displaced by unproductive resolutions to conflicts at school? Racial tension was not invisible in the community.

During a review of the writing prompts that measured satisfaction, the category of lasting resolutions emerged. Subjects explained that they were skeptical about the other disputant abiding to a mediation agreement based on their observations that past agreements had not lasted.

Apparently, signing an agreement did not influence all disputants to change their initial conflict-producing behaviors.

Student Satisfaction

With the criteria of answering the questions and legibility, 43 student responses to an open-ended writing prompt about satisfaction with CM were retained for evaluation by two independent scorers. Preliminary t tests with the responses made evident variables that were associated with satisfaction. Subsequent chi-square tests of variables displayed the patterns of responses that had near significant values, $p < .05$, in the t tests.

Table 1 below displays the data for responses by ethnic identity. Caucasians and African-Americans had higher rates of satisfaction than did Latinos and Asians. An antecedent may be a more common usage of assertive communication in the daily interaction at school of Caucasians and African-Americans. A mismatch between styles and goals in conflict communication could have been a source of the dissatisfaction patterns. Also, parental permission to participate in instrumentation in this study may have filtered out less-satisfied subjects. For example, Sarah, the disputant described above from an observation, did not have parent permission for participation in instrumentation.

Table 1

CR Satisfaction and Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Dis.	Satisfied	Total
Caucasian	5	18	23
Black	1	4	5
Hispanic	6	6	12
Asian	2	1	3
Total	14	29	43

Consequently, Sarah's level of personal satisfaction is not documented. The skepticism about the strength of agreements that several participating subjects expressed was understandable. Could Sarah stick to her agreement to ignore the racial taunts of her classmates, and should she? If she did abide by that agreement, did she live with building resentment or simply discount the taunts as maladaptive behavior that did not really affect her? Were students expected to forgive and forget racism after attending a CM session? Issues of racism in a school needs faculty and family communication with students. Researchers of racism in education point out that "Racist comments should be dealt with immediately, and in a straightforward manner" (Gayles-Felton, Hilliard, & Vold, 1999, p. 101). Thus, Sarah should not have to go to CM on her own to cope with racial defamation issues in her classroom.

Avoidance

An underlying current in the mediation process was avoidance. Violence on campus was avoided by participation in the intervention. The administration was avoided with the CM facilitator silently listening to the students' troubles instead of one of the four administrators at each school. The confidentiality agreement ensured the avoidance of teachers and parents and the privacy of the disputant's conflict.[1] Finally, the students' agreements to stay away from (avoid) each other, which was the most common resolution found in the mediation records, constituted their idea about how to end the conflict.

Thus, the implementation of the conflict-resolution program accomplished (with students who went to mediation) one of the primary goals; the avoidance of violence on campus. Students communicated through mediators about their conflicts and their feelings before selecting a resolution they conceived. Several resolutions were to avoid each other, although a few were agreements between friends to stop the behaviors that caused their mutual conflict so they could improve their relations. However, the other goal of improving communication and empowering students to peacefully manage conflict in their lives was partially accomplished. Students learned

[1] There was less avoidance at Central where teachers facilitated the mediations.

to go to a third party and speak indirectly before signing an agreement to end their conflict. Direct communication and conflict resolution without third-party intervention was the remainder of the second goal that the students needed to accomplish in the peace-education program.

Communication Gaps

The communication gaps that were identified in this study were between students as well as their caretakers at school. The limitation of L2 student participation at one school was a cultural-communication gap in the program. Students who did participate in CM were often unable to think of productive resolutions to their conflicts, especially where faculty did not facilitate the intervention, and made agreements to communicate less instead of more. Without information about the conflicts their children were facing at school, parents were not able to provide the counseling and monitoring that many might want to do if they had been informed. Finally, faculty who were trained to provide guidance for their students were not informed of the conflicts that students faced unless they had observed the conflict or learned of it through unstructured conversations.

Communication channels are a challenge to keep open, especially in the context of a multicultural society and in a bureaucracy. Analysts point out that

> Communication gaps are pervasive in modern society; they are basic to generation gaps, racial gaps, gender gaps, and international gaps. They occur when language is used to conceal and veil, rather than to reveal and openly express. (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1997, p. 164)

The privacy agreement of disputing students who come to mediation is intended to promote their communication in that context and protect them from the spread of rumors about their dispute. However, the privacy is not productive when it prevents needed assistance with the transformation of inequitable and potentially violent social relations.

Discussion

Summary

This study employed a multi-method procedure to identify factors that influenced middle-school students' experiences in conflict mediation (CM) at school. The mediation intervention diffused conflicts for the students who participated. Students who did not participate were those

with limited-English-proficiency or low self-concept. The formal-mediation process avoided the involvement of authority figures and caretakers; administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents. Student participation in, and satisfaction with, CM was variable and associated with ethnicity as well as English fluency, which served as a filter for participation where bilingual facilitators were not used. Ethnic minorities as a whole had lower satisfaction than Caucasians. In their writing about satisfaction, several students expressed skepticism about the strength of the agreements that were made in CM. Avoidance resolutions to their conflicts were made by students; "Stay away from each other." and they expressed skepticism of the agreements they made in CM. Gaps in the conflict-resolution communication process were apparent.

Caretaker detachment from the conflict resolution process was evident. Information about the students' conflicts and the resolutions they chose was kept confidential in historical records, which is typical of current conflict-mediation interventions. The lack of involvement by the students' caretakers provided student privacy, thereby failing to inform their parents of the problems their children faced. The communication gaps that existed in the intervention allowed for reproductive resolutions; the avoidance of social cooperation, acceptance, and understanding.

Reproductive resolutions were common in CM while transformative outcomes were limited to the avoidance of violence. Although resolutions that avoided physical violence on campus were made, they often did not address the social problems that created the conflicts. Verbal violence, such as ethnic defamation, was diffused with CM outside of the social contexts which framed the conflicts. According to the participants, conflicts were documented and agreements were made, but not always kept nor perceived as personally helpful. Nothing was binding in their CM agreements. The students' common avoidance resolutions were reproductive of existing social problems and had the potential for conflict recurrence and violence. A consequence of the communication gaps in the program was the unrecognized continuation of students' problems unless they became destructive or the students returned for more help in CM, which was infrequent. Characteristics of destructive conflicts are those that continue to grow and those that are 'rigid' in the disputants' perceptions (Deutsch, 1998). A communication system that does not

recognize and monitor potentially dangerous conflicts needs reorganization or replacement. Furthermore, the hidden curriculum in mediation programs, the adoption of a majority perspective and style of communication, needs further examination to investigate how minorities with different styles of conflict resolution fare in school mediations (Carter, 1999).

Implications For Practice

Improvement of the program would include the training of the CM facilitators and mediators to ensure the disputants find a productive resolution. The resolution of a conflict in a manner that addresses the cause, is just, and improves the disputants' relations constitutes a productive resolution. Guiding questions to answer in CM should also be included to assess the disputant's relationship.

> How has the conflict influenced their relationship? How could they handle the conflict in ways that maintain or improve the relationship? (Berman, 1990, p.4)

The school staff that facilitates CM needs to identify and respond to potentially dangerous conflicts. CM staff should document conflicts in greater detail and inform the parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators so they can assist in the conflict-resolution process. The result of this collaboration should be increased communication and coordination between disputants' caretakers; the entire school staff and their families. The present privacy pact of CM participants is not serving the disputants' needs when their caretakers are not informed of the existence and nature of their potentially dangerous problems. Identification of actions that disputants need to take in the form of advice from parents and counselors may help disputants who have not found productive resolutions to their conflicts. Follow-up communication after CM could facilitate this process. To increase the participation of all students, bilingual CM facilitators should be identified and trained, yet not be the only ones who implement the intervention like those at Central lest students perceive the program as a 'minority' intervention.

Communication between disputants should also be fostered in a CM program. Students might verbalize to each other their resolutions and their plan for carrying it out. To further increase communication and improve their relations, the resolution of avoidance, "stay away from each other," should be eliminated as an option. If the students cannot find a resolution in which their

interactions will continue and improve, the school staff should be notified to help the students. Perhaps a change from the competitive "win win " metaphor to a collaboratively constructive one would help disputants view formal conflict resolution as cooperative instead of competitive. For example, a metaphor for disputants could be, we are building a path of cooperation on which we can move towards fulfillment of both our needs. The process of "bridging" has been recommended in a book titled *I Win: You Win* (Wertheim, Love, Littlefield & Peck, 1992).

School faculty should also be informed of the conflicts students are experiencing and they should help facilitate the resolution and relationship building processes. Counselors could be notified to listen to the disputants and monitor their relations. Administrators and other supervisory staff should be informed to watch and interact with the disputants to encourage their positive interaction. Indeed, counselor's and administrator's hours typically spent on diagnostic testing and documenting students' problems at school might be more productive if focused on prevention of and assistance with their problems. Teachers also need to be more available for student communication and aware of their problems especially for the sake of monitoring the success of the agreements the students make in CM. It is not a new demand of teachers to

> ...be more accessible to students; students must feel comfortable in talking with their teachers and principals about personal and school-related problems. (Crews and Counts, 1997, p. 137)

Although the need has been recognized for teachers to listen to and counsel students who are having conflicts, research has demonstrated that teachers often do not feel able to perform violence-prevention functions because they lack training (Guiton, Griffin, Polousky, Sobol, Chen & Fung, 1998).

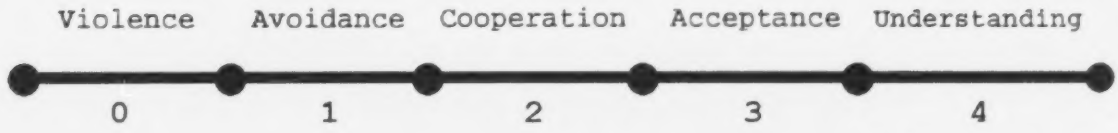
Subsequent actions should be included in the CM program to assess the students' outcomes of their resolution agreements. Outcome-assessment procedures could be done by the CM facilitator or other staff members such as counselors and teachers in instruction-free periods. In a follow-up step, students should evaluate their resolution and talk directly to each other about their relationship. That could be done in response to a verbal prompt. In situations where a follow-up meeting is impossible, a written prompt could be given to the students. Intrinsic rewards for the

former disputants' improved relations should be identified in the follow-up step by the facilitator. Students who had not experienced success with their resolutions should be counseled and helped to identify other resolutions that might better foster their improved relations with the other disputant.

The problem-solving steps of different conflict-resolution programs include a step for having a goal. Yet, they fail to specifically define the goal or provide a limited one (Elias et al., 1997). Personal benefit and "wise course of action" are criteria Johnson and Johnson (1995, p. 67) recommend students use as goals to evaluate the proposed agreements they generate. The personal satisfaction or personal needs goals, that are common to disputants with individualistic cultures, is the most common criteria found in conflict resolution programs that are designed for schools (Kreidler, 1997; Lieber, 1998). Research on the relationship between personal identity and personal satisfaction with CM indicates that that narrow perspective as a goal has been unproductive, especially for students whose cultures are not individualistic in conflict resolution. Bodine and Crawford recognize the different standards disputants may have in searching for a satisfactory agreement, they simply recommend use of a standard which "...has been used in by the parties in the past or which standards is more widely applied" (1998, p. 55). Use of the standards which are familiar to disputants have not been productive and are insufficient as a goal. Thus, conflict resolution programs could improve by refining the goal component of the resolution process.

A broader goal is needed in the evaluation of a proposed conflict resolution. Analysts of social milieu in school recommend the goal of community building (Berman, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1994). With that goal and an instrument for rating outcomes that would likely result from proposed resolutions, students could be guided to evaluate the agreements they are considering in CM. A continuum of behaviors might be useful in identification of the students' resolution outcomes. Below is one that progresses to understanding, which is the goal of peaceful-social interaction in a community of any size and composition.

Figure 1. Carter's continuum of conflict-responses.



Students could use the continuum to identify the level of their resolutions. To make the experience more relevant to their classroom contexts, the points on the continuum could be assigned descending numbers; zero to four, for scoring the possible outcomes of their agreement. Students should see why there are higher scores for outcomes that lead to the goal of community building through understanding, which includes acceptance and cooperation. School personnel and parents could also monitor student progression on the continuum as an interaction scale when they discuss human relations in lessons and in CM follow-up discourse.

In his discussion of the ethical contexts of education, Young (1997) points out the importance of knowing what is valued as "the good." Private schools with strong religious creeds have the good defined for their students. Public schools also need a definition for evaluation criteria in conflict situations. Indeed, conflicts are opportunities for defining the good. With the goal of community building as primary, "Searching for the good in each alternative can help two sides reach a common ground (Young, 1997, p. 122). The good resolution would be just for both disputants and thereby build community in the school through their improved relations. Peace educators agree that the development of students' analytical skills in conflict contexts will help them to "act with moral intelligence in a variety of contexts (Field, 1999, p. 6)

The CM process needs to help students attain a productive resolution; one that is just for both disputants and will improve their relations. For that purpose, conflict-mediation programs need to be redesigned or replaced by more effective means of peace building at school.

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